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IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1970

Nos. 680, 681, 682,
683, 684, 685

CONTINENTAL OIL COMPANY, et al.,

Petitioners,

v.

FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION,

Respondent.

(Continued on inside cover)

ON PETITIONS FOR WRITS OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

BRIEF IN OPPOSITION FOR THE RESPONDENT, MUNICIPAL DISTRIBUTOR GROUP

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TEXACO, INC., et al.,

Petitioners,

v.

FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION,

Respondent.

THE CALIFORNIA COMPANY, A DIVISION OF CHEVRON OIL COMPANY,

Petitioner,

v.

FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION,

Respondent.

BRADCO PROPERTIES, INC., et al.,

Petitioners,

v.

FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION,

Respondent.

E. COCKRELL, JR.,

Petitioner,

v.

FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION,

Respondent.

THE SUPERIOR OIL COMPANY,

Cross-Petitioner,

v.

FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION,

Respondent.

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BRIEF IN OPPOSITION FOR THE RESPONDENT, MUNICIPAL DISTRIBUTOR GROUP[2]

[1] The Federal Power Commission was the only named respondent in the petitions; however, under this Court's rules, the petitioners must name all other parties to the proceeding below as respondents. (Rule 21, par. 4). The Municipal Distributor Group (MDG) was a party to the proceeding before the Commission and the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and was served with a copy of the petitions. The MDG, therefore, is a respondent, though not named in the petitions. MDG has also filed a petition for writ of certiorari (No. 669) limited solely to the question of whether the Commission may retroactively revise the rates affirmed by the court below.

[2] The Municipal Distributor Group comprises Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division operating municipal gas, electric and water systems in Memphis, Tennessee, and surrounding Shelby County, Tennessee, nine other Tennessee public systems, and American Public Gas Association, having a membership of 201 public systems operating in 28 states.

OPINIONS BELOW

The Opinion of the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and its Opinion on petitions for rehearing are not yet reported. They are printed respectively in Appendices A (pp. 1-70) and B (pp. 1-37) to the petition of Continental Oil Company and Mobil Oil Corporation in No. 680. The opinions and orders of the Federal Power Commission are reported at 40 FPC 530 and 41 FPC 301, and are printed as Appendices D (pp. 1-256) and E (pp. 1-112) to Continental Oil Company's petition.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the Court of Appeals, printed as Appendix C to the petition of Continental Oil Company and Mobil Oil Corporation was entered on March 19, 1970. The Court of Appeals denied the petitions for rehearing by an opinion issued June 16, 1970 (App. B, pp. 1-3). The mandate was issued July 14, 1970. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. 1254(1) and Section 19(b) of the Natural Gas Act, 15 U.S.C. 717r(b).

QUESTION PRESENTED

Whether the Court of Appeals was correct in affirming the Federal Power Commission's opinions and orders.

STATUTE INVOLVED

The pertinent provisions of the Natural Gas Act, 52 Stat. 821-833, as amended, 15 U.S.C. 717-717w, are set out in Appendix F to the petition of Continental Oil Company and Mobil Oil Corporation.

STATEMENT

PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE COMMISSION

In May 1961, the Federal Power Commission ("Commission") initiated an investigation to determine and fix the just and reasonable ceiling rates for all sales by independent producers of natural gas in interstate commerce from Southern Louisiana, including the area offshore Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico[3] (App. D, p. 6; 40 FPC 542). The Commission has described this area, particularly the offshore area, as constituting at the present time and for the foreseeable future a principal area of development of natural gas in the United States (App. D, pp. 6, 10-12; 40 FPC 542, 544-46).

The Commission initiated the investigation under Section 5(a) of the Natural Gas Act (Act)[4] and named as respondents 252 natural gas producers. The Commission also consolidated with the proceedings 199 Section 4(e)[5] proceedings involving 70 of the 252 producers (App. D, p. 6; 40 FPC 542). Numerous distributors of natural gas, private and public, interstate natural gas pipeline companies, state regulatory commissions, other interested parties, and the Commission's Staff participated in the proceedings.

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[3]The Commission has defined this area to include all parts of the State of Louisiana south of the thirty-first parallel, including all areas, both State and Federal, in the Gulf of Mexico off the shore of Louisiana. (App D, p. 6; 40 FPC 542).

[4]Section 5(a) clothes the Commission with the authority to initiate rate investigations on its own motion and, after hearing, to fix just and reasonable rates which are to be prospectively effective, i.e., from and after the date of issuance of the Commission's order fixing the just and reasonable rates (App. F, pp. 3-4).

[5]Section 4(e) proceedings resulted from the unilateral filing of notices of rate changes by producers under Section 4(d) of the Act. When filed they are subject to suspension for a five-month period, and if the rate investigation thereby initiated is not concluded at the end of the suspension period, the increased rates may be made effective subject to refund. (App. F, pp. 2-3).

Prehearing conferences and other meetings were held in an effort to bring the massive proceedings within manageable proportions. After these conferences and meetings had taken place, the cases-in-chief were prepared and served in advance of hearing and were placed in evidence on December 10, 1963. Rebuttal evidence was placed in evidence on March 24, 1964. Cross-examination commenced on April 23, 1964.

The hearings, with recesses, continued until the record was closed on November 5, 1965. The hearings produced a transcript of more than 34,000 pages, about 300 exhibits (most of them voluminous), and many items by reference (for the most part also voluminous).

The Presiding Examiner's decision was issued December 30, 1966 (III J.A. (1) 62d-447d, 40 FPC 703-902). With some exceptions the Examiner adhered to the Commission's *Permian* opinion (*Area Rate Proceeding*, Docket No. AR61-1, Opinion No. 468, 34 FPC 159, affirmed *Permian Basin Area Rate Cases*, 390 U.S. 747. He recommended maximum just and reasonable rates, depending on vintage and whether offshore or onshore production, of 16.75¢ to 19.5¢ per Mcf. After hearing oral argument *en banc*, on May 15 and 16, 1967, the Commission on September 25, 1968 issued its Opinion No. 546 and accompanying order (App. D, pp. 1-258, 40 FPC 530-702).[6] After consideration of applications for rehearing and motions to reopen, the Commission on March 20, 1969 issued its supplemental Opinion No. 546-A and accompanying order (App. E, pp. 1-112; 41 FPC 301). By the supplemental opinion and order, the Commission modified the original opinion and order in

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[6]The decision was issued after this Court on May 1, 1968 had sustained in their entirety the rate orders issued by the Commission in its first effort to fix producer rates on an area, rather than an individual company, basis. The first proceeding involved the Permian Basin. *Area Rate Proceeding*, Docket No. AR61-1, 24 FPC 1121 (1960), affirmed, *Permian Basin Area Rate Cases*, 390 U.S. 747 (May 1, 1968).

part, denied the motions for stay filed by many producers, and in all other respects denied the applications for rehearing.

THE COMMISSION'S OPINIONS NO. 546 AND 546-A AND ACCOMPANYING ORDERS.

The Commission established three vintages of natural gas and established the following as the just and reasonable ceiling rate for each vintage (App. D, p. 9; 40 FPC 544):[7]

Vintage	Rate	
	On Shore	Off Shore
	(cents per Mcf)	
All casinghead or oil well[8] gas (gas produced in association with oil) and pre-1961 gas-well gas (including residue gas derived from it) [old or flowing gas-well gas]	18-1/2	17
Gas-well gas sold under contracts dated January 1, 1961 through September 30, 1968 [new gas-well gas]	19-1/2	18
Gas-well gas sold under contracts dated October 1, 1968 or later [new gas-well gas]	20	18-1/2

[7]The Commission fixed January 1, 1961 as the date of division between "new gas-well gas and old gas-well gas". The latter type is also called "flowing gas" by the Commission (App. D, pp. 27-8; 40 FPC 555).

[8]The Commission found that casinghead gas is discovered largely as a product of the search for oil and therefore exploration for it could not be encouraged by awarding such gas the higher second and third vintage rates. The Commission, for this reason, fixed the rates for casinghead gas irrespective of vintage at the first vintage rates (App. D, pp. 85-6; 40 FPC 590-91).

The difference between on-shore and off-shore prices of 1-1/2 cents per Mcf represented the Commission's allowance in on-shore gas prices for Louisiana severance tax (App. D, p. 9; 40 FPC 544).

All of the prices were subject to upward and downward adjustment for heating value (Btu content) and the third vintage rates were also subject to reductions in the event of deviation from specified quality standards.

The rates for second vintage gas-well gas and the even higher rates for third vintage gas were awarded to elicit supply and to encourage continuation of necessary exploration and development.

With respect to rates collected by producers under Section 4(e) of the Act, the Commission rules that refunds would be required by further order of the Commission of the difference between the just and reasonable rate prescribed in Opinion No. 546 and the rate collected subject to refund (App. D, p. 143; 40 FPC 626). With respect to all other rates, the Commission ordered that the collection of rates in excess of the applicable area rate established in Opinion No. 546 from and after September 25, 1968, the effective date of the opinion, shall be subject to refund, plus interest at 7 percent.

The Commission ordered that these ceiling prices would be subject to change only in accordance with the procedure prescribed in Opinion No. 546. Under the procedure there prescribed, any seller seeking to charge rates in excess of the ceiling prices or requesting a change thereof must file a petition for waiver of the Commission-prescribed price and must justify fully the relief sought (App. D, p. 182; 40 FPC 650). Unless and until the Commission grants the petition, the seller may not file rate increases in excess of the applicable area rate prescribed in Opinion No. 546 (App. D, p. 182; 40 FPC 650). These rate-change provisions have been commonly described as prescribing an indefinite moratorium on rate changes.

The Commission's opinion departed from *Permian*, affirmed by this Court in full four months earlier, in a major respect. In *Permian*, the rates prescribed by the Commission were based directly on the costs, including a fair rate of return, determined by the Commission. In the present case, however, the Commission added a series of bonuses or cushions to each category of costs with the result that the rates prescribed were above the cost determinations, including rate of return, of up to 2¢ per Mcf. Consequently, although the prescribed rates were nominally based on a 12 percent overall rate of return on rate base, yielding approximately 13.3 percent return on common stock equity (App. D, pp. 67-8, 104; 40 FPC 579, 601), as the Commission conceded in the court below (Br. for FPC, p. 27, note 12) and the court below found (App. A, p. 40, note), the increments over cost increased the rate of return to more than 14 percent for Louisiana taxed gas (onshore) and to more than 16 percent for untaxed offshore gas.

After consideration of applications for rehearing the Commission on March 20, 1969 issued its Opinion No. 546-A and accompanying order modifying in part and confirming in part Opinion No. 546 and order.

The Commission re-affirmed that the rates established in Opinion No. 546 were just and reasonable. The Commission, however, while re-affirming that 18.5 cents per Mcf was the just and reasonable rate for offshore third vintage gas, exempted such gas from the rate change procedure prescribed by the Commission and authorized producers of such gas to file for contractually authorized increases up to 20 cents per Mcf, subject to suspension and possible refund (App. E, pp. 3-6; 41 FPC 306-07). The Commission also limited the application of the rate change procedures for third vintage on-shore gas sales to a five year period ending January 1, 1974 (App. E, pp. 7-8; 41 FPC 308-09).

Concurrent with the denial of all petitions for rehearing, the Commission initiated a second area rate proceeding at Docket No. AR69-1, limited to certain specified Southern

Louisiana offshore production areas, for the purpose of investigating the allegations of a gas shortage and cause therefor, if one in fact did exist, and to review the rates prescribed for such areas, and, if necessary, to prescribe new rates (App. E, pp. 4-5, 41 FPC 306; 41 FPC 378).[9] Referring to the new rate investigation, at that time limited to offshore production areas in the Federal domain, the Commission said (App. E, pp. 4-5):

> Many of the petitions for rehearing filed by the producers herein, and the motion for further argument filed by the Pipeline Group on November 22, 1968, devote primary attention to the basic question of the adequacy of present gas supplies to meet the increasing demands for natural gas and the adequacy of the rates established in Opinion 546 to elicit the future exploration, development and dedication necessary to meet this demand. No probative showing, based on the record before us, has been made in any such pleadings indicating that the prices we have established will be inadequate to bring forth the optimum degree of effort by the industry. However, the pleadings do lead us to the conclusion that the vital importance of future additional gas supply from the offshore areas in Southern Louisiana warrants the immediate commencement of the further proceeding we had contemplated in our original Opinion herein looking towards a possible revision of the area price ceilings for such gas.

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[9]Subsequently, by order issued December 15, 1969, the Commission enlarged Docket No. AR69-1 to include all offshore and onshore Southern Louisiana production areas with the result that the new proceeding became a second round area rate proceeding for Southern Louisiana reaching all rates prescribed in the present case. The new area rate proceeding is now in progress before a Presiding Examiner, any new rates prescribed would be effective from and after the issuance of a final rate order, consistent with the Commission's authority to fix rates prospectively only. *Sections 4(e) and 5(a); Hope Natural Gas v. FPC* (CA 4, 1952), 196 F.2d 803.

Petitions for review were filed in several courts of appeals within minutes of each other after public issuance by the Commission of its Opinion No. 546-A and order. The filing of a petition in the court below being first in time, review jurisdiction vested in that court. Petitions for review filed by producers and pipeline companies challenged the prescribed rates as too low and petitions for review filed by consumer representatives challenged them as too high.

By order of May 13, 1969, the court below granted a stay until hearing on the merits in June 1969, with this stay to expire no later than July 1, 1969. Thereafter, upon numerous producer requests for a later hearing, a conference was convened by the court below to consider these requests. As a consequence, the oral argument was postponed until October 6, 1969 and the Commission, at the court's request, stayed the ordered rate reductions (but no other aspects of its order) until October 13, 1969. The oral argument was held on October 6, 1969, before a panel of the court below which subsequently, by order issued October 17, 1969, vacated the submission of the cause to that panel and reassigned the case for argument and determination before an entirely new panel of judges of the same court. The stay of the Commission's orders was continued. The new panel heard oral argument on December 17, 1969.

Thereafter, on March 19, 1970, the Court below filed its opinion and judgment sustaining in full the Commission's opinions and orders (App. A, p. 69). While expressing less than "full satisfaction" with the Commission's "performance", both with respect to producer and consumer positions, the Court below rejected producer and consumer objections to the orders and found them to be sustained by substantial evidence and free from legal error, recognizing in this connection "that the process of producer regulation is a difficult one that the Commission must have latitude to adapt to changing conditions" (App. A, pp. 2-3, 10, 20-21, 24, 29-30, 40). The court below went on to say that its mandate "should not, however, be interpreted to inter-

fere with Commission action that would change the rates we have approved here." (App. A, p. 69).

Petitions for rehearing were filed by the producer and pipeline petitioners. These petitioners, *inter alia*, agreed that the Commission, notwithstanding affirmance, may modify its orders for the future and the rates to be charged prospectively, but expressed grave doubts that the Commission could revise the rates prescribed in Opinion No. 546, as modified by Opinion No. 546-A, retroactively. Producer and pipeline petitions for rehearing, therefore, urged the court below, as a means of preserving the Commission's authority to revise the rates retroactively, to grant rehearing, and upon such rehearing, to either instruct "the Commission to make further findings on issues deemed deficient by the Court" or to "grant the Motion for Leave to Adduce Additional Evidence heretofore filed" (e.g., Petition for Rehearing of Humble Oil & Refining Company and Humble Gas Transmission Company, pp. 3, 9; Amerada Hess, et al., pp. 2-3, 9-10).

On May 11, 1970, the court below directed the Commission and other parties to the review proceedings to respond to two questions:

> (1) Whether the Federal Power Commission has authority to stay, modify, or rescind an order once that order has been affirmed by this Court, if circumstances appearing since the entry of the order seem to make these actions advisable.
>
> (2) Whether this Court may, in the exercise of its equitable powers, affirm an order of the Commission while preserving the authority of the Federal Power Commission to stay, modify, or rescind the order if the circumstances seem to make these actions advisable.

Responses were filed by MDG, the New York Public Service Commission, Associated Gas Distributors (a group of private distributors of natural gas), and the Commission.

All responses agreed that following affirmance of the Commission's orders, the Commission would not have the power under the Natural Gas Act to revise retroactively the prescribed rates. The Commission also responded that the extent of the Court's equitable powers under Section 19(b) of the Natural Gas Act "apparently has not been decided" and that the extent to which the court's equitable powers "would transcend these statutory powers would be determined by" the court below. Over the vigorous dissent of Commissioner O'Connor, joined by Chairman Nassikas, the Commission by a 3 to 2 vote, concluded its response with an about-face request for remand, unaccompanied by any explanation.

The Municipal Distributor Group, the Associated Gas Distributors and the Public Service Commission of New York opposed the request for remand.

On June 16, 1970, the court below entered an order denying the petitions for rehearing.

The court below stated (App. B, pp. 1-3):

> . . . We wish to make crystal clear the authority of the Commission in this case to reopen any part of its order that circumstances require be reopened. Under section 19(b) of the Natural Gas Act, this Court has the broad remedial powers that inhere in a court of equity, and pursuant to our equitable powers we make it part of the remedy in this case that the authority of the Commission to reopen any part of its orders, including those affecting revenues from gas already delivered, is left intact. The Commission can make retrospective as well as prospective adjustments in this case if it finds that it is in the public interest to do so.
>
> At the same time, we emphasize that our judgment is an affirmance and not a remand. The appropriate place for originally considering what parts of the orders must be reopened in light of new evidence is before the Commission. It may be that the Commission will decide that the refunds it has

> ordered are just and reasonable or at least that their significance to the public interest is outweighed by the confusion and delay that would result from their reopening. In this event, the Commission will allow its refund orders to stand as they are. Or it may be that the refunds are too burdensome in light of new evidence to be in the public interest. In that case it is our judgment that the Commission shall have the power and the duty to remedy the situation by changing its orders.
>
> In all other respects, the original opinion of this Court is the final disposition of this appeal.[10]

Subsequently, the court below denied producer applications for stay of the mandate, but on July 2, 1970, acting on its own motion, and without notice, the Commission entered an order continuing the stay of Opinions No. 546 and 546-A and accompanying orders.[11]

On July 2, 1970, certain producers, based on the decision of June 16, 1970 of the court below, filed a motion for continuation of the stay and for reopening of the proceedings and consolidation thereof with the new, second round of Southern Louisiana area rate proceedings at Docket No. AR69-1 and for retroactive reconsideration of the rate levels and refund requirements of the orders affirmed by the court below. Pending also before the Commission are petitions by two producers for exemption from the refund requirements of the orders.

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[10] MDG in No. 669, the New York Public Service Commission in No. 692, and the Associated Gas Distributors in No. 691, have filed petitions for writs of certiorari directed to the ruling of the court below that the Commission may revise rates retroactively.

[11] MDG's application for rehearing of the Commission's July 2 order continuing the stay on the ground that the order is beyond the Commission's power, was denied by order issued September 30, 1970.

ARGUMENT

The decision of the court below in the respects challenged by Continental Oil Company and Mobil Oil Corporation (Petitioners),[12] does not conflict with any decision of this Court or with decisions of another circuit court of appeals. The court below properly exercised its functions as a reviewing court and properly affirmed the Commission's opinions and orders on the ground that they are supported by substantial evidence, followed legal standards, and are free from legal error. No issues raised by Petitioners warrant or necessitate review of this Court.

1. In the *Permian Basin Area Rate Cases*, 390 U.S. 747, this Court emphasized that reviewing court's "authority is essentially narrow and circumscribed." (390 U.S. at 766). For the Commission's findings, if supported by substantial evidence, are unqualifiedly conclusive upon the court (390 U.S. at 767); Congress "has entrusted regulation of the natural gas industry to the informed judgment of the Commission, and not to the preferences of reviewing courts." (390 U.S. at 767); the orders of the Commission are presumptively valid and those who would overturn them have "the heavy burden of making a convincing showing that it is invalid because it is unjust and unreasonable in its consequences." (390 U.S. at 767); and each detail of the Commission's decision need not be examined if the total effect of the order cannot be said to be unjust and unreasonable, judicial inquiry under the Act is at an end (390 U.S. at 767).

In fulfilling its review function, this Court said, a reviewing court has essentially three responsibilities: first, to

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[12] The petitions filed in Nos. 681, 682, 683, 684 and 685 raise substantially the same issues raised by Petitioners in No. 680. Accordingly, while referring only to Petitioners' position in No. 680 in this brief in opposition, it is also intended to be, and is filed, as MDG's brief in opposition to the petitions in Nos. 681, 682, 683, 684 and 685.

determine whether the Commission's orders, viewed in light of the relevant facts and its broad regulatory duties, abused or exceeded its authority; second, to examine the manner in which the Commission employed the methods of regulation it has selected and to decide whether each of the orders' essential elements is supported by substantial evidence; and third, to determine whether the order may reasonably be expected to maintain financial integrity, attract necessary capital and fairly compensate investors for the risks they have assumed, and yet provide appropriate protection to the relevant public interests, both existing and foreseeable. (390 U.S. at 791-2).

The court below was fully aware of its authority and its responsibilities as a reviewing court as delineated by this Court (App. A, pp. 9, 10) and the court below correctly performed its function. On the question of the specification of the circumstances under which producers could secure relief from the rates prescribed by the Commission, the court below found that the Commission had responded to this Court's suggestion in *Permian* for a more precise specification of changed circumstances that would be ground for relief, and had given examples which "probably constitute as specific an exposition of circumstances for relief as can be expected at this stage in area regulation" (App. A, p. 15). With respect to consumer arguments that the Commission's cost determinations were excessive and that allocation methods adopted by the Commission assigned too much to natural gas and too little to oil, the court below found that the Commission acted on the basis of substantial evidence (App. A, pp. 18-21 and notes 29 to 34, inclusive). With respect to rate of return, the court below reviewed consumer arguments that the 12 percent rate of return was too high and producer arguments that it was too low and rejected the arguments of each on the ground that the Commission's findings on rate of return were supported by substantial evidence and "followed proper legal standards," noting that the "noncost factors" increased the allowed 12 percent rate of return to 14 to 16 percent

(App. A, pp. 23, 24, 40, and note on p. 40). Concerning producer attacks on Commission cost determinations, the court below found that the producers' attacks on the use of cost and on the cost determinations were also made in *Permian* and were there rejected by this Court (App. A, pp. 40-42); and that the Commission's cost findings here were supported by substantial evidence (App. A, 41-42). Respecting the producers' arguments that the record was stale and unrepresentative, despite the fact that there was no issue as to test year before the Commission, the court below rejected the arguments, correctly relying on *ICC v. Jersey City*, 322 U.S. 503, 514-5, and correctly finding that the Commission considered "some data covering years as recent as 1966" and in making choices between older and more recent data on the ground of greater reliability or representativeness "did not fail to consider the most recent data in the record, and it adjusted its findings to allow for rising or falling cost trends" (App. A, p. 44). "Most importantly", the court below found, "it made a finding that costs as a whole during this decade had been remarkably stable (or were even declining slightly) and were likely to remain so, and this finding is based upon substantial evidence." (App. A, p. 44).

In view of the court's findings that the Commission's rulings followed legal standards and were based on substantial evidence, the court below stayed within its proper sphere when it entered its judgment of affirmance. Indeed, contrary to Petitioners' contention (Pet., p. 17) this was the only logical, lawful and required action; not reversal and remand. The court below understood and properly fulfilled its judicial role as a reviewing court.

It is, of course, true that the court below was not entirely satisfied with the extent of some of the Commission's findings and explanations, as they affected consumer and producer arguments, but the court below did not find that the deficiencies amounted to reversible error. Having found that proper legal standards were employed and that substantial

evidence supported the findings on every important aspect of the case that bears on recovery of costs, including an extremely generous 14 to 16 percent rate of return, the court below correctly refused to regard the Commission's opinions and orders when viewed in their entirety as reversible.

Federal Power Commission v. United Gas Pipe Line Company, 393 U.S. 71 (1968) and *Sunray Mid-Continent Oil Co. v. Federal Power Commission*, 353 U.S. 944 (1957), cited by Petitioners (Pet. 17), are not in point. In the *United* case, *supra*, the Fifth Circuit undertook to decide how a tax allocation formula should be applied although the Commission had never considered the question. This Court summarily reversed the Fifth Circuit on the ground that it should have remanded the question for consideration by the Commission in the first instance (393 U.S. at 73). Nothing of that nature is involved in this case. In *Sunray Mid-Continent*, the Tenth Circuit reversed the Commission (239 F.2d 97) because it had erred in its interpretation of its authority under Section 7 of the Natural Gas Act. This Court held that the power of the reviewing court was exhausted when it so ruled and that it should have remanded the case to the Commission for consideration on the merits (353 U.S. at 945). This fact situation is not present in this case. Here, the relevant questions presented by the record evidence had been considered and the court ruled that all rulings on such questions were lawful and were supported by substantial evidence.

2. Petitioners' continued insistence that the methods of rate regulation employed by the Commission for producers are inapplicable to producers and that the Commission's cost determinations in this case are faulty (Pet. 15, 23, 24-25) are without merit and provide no basis for a grant of their petition. The same arguments respecting methodology, particularly reliance on cost, were rejected by this Court in *Permian* where they were specifically found to have a "reasoned foundation" and to be within the area of the Com-

mission's expert judgment (390 U.S. at 824), and were rejected by the court below for the same reasons (App. A, pp. 40-42). As for the cost determinations in this case, they were found to be supported by substantial evidence and in accord with legal standards. Petitioners show nothing in their petition requiring a contrary conclusion. Petitioners rely on bold assertion, without record support and citation.

3. The Alpha and Omega of the Petitioners' argument for a writ of certiorari is the claim that there is a present shortage of natural gas which "is directly involved in this case because rates prescribed apply to an area that now provides up to one-third of the total national supply and serves more than one-half the consuming population of the United States." (Pet. 15, 24, 25).[13]

Petitioners state that "the only valid question remaining is, in essence, how to remedy" the supply "situation" (Pet. p. 16), and suggest that reversal is the only remedy (Pet. p. 16). Inherent in the argument is the unwarranted assumption that "the Commission's ill-founded and unsound regulatory concepts have hastened, if not caused, the present critical gas supply shortages." (Pet. p. 24).

Any number of reasons may account for the "shortage", however, which have no relationship to the present order

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[13] Assuming, *arguendo*, that there is a shortage of natural gas, it is important that the Court not be misled. The "shortage" does not affect existing commitments to consumers. There is no "shortage" to meet such existing commitments: The "shortage" refers to new increments of gas to meet an unexpected and explosive recent demand for natural gas, primarily industrial, as a result of air pollution and other environmental considerations. The demand for natural gas has been aggravated by the shortage of other fuels such as low sulphur oil and coal that are suitable for such purposes. The "shortage" assumes all demands should be served by natural gas disregarding the question of the economically wasteful use of natural gas and efficient allocation of the Nation's energy resources, including natural gas, in the Nation's best interests.

in particular and the Commission's regulatory policies in general.[14]

The "shortage" may be the consequence of the acknowledged explosive increase in demand for gas that the industry did not anticipate or prepare for. The "shortage", such as it is, may be the consequence of tax policies that may have reduced internally generated funds available for exploration and development rather than any Commission pricing of natural gas. Depressed sales of oil, upon which the industry principally relies for internally generated funds for exploration and development, may have reduced exploratory effort. Enormous commitments made by the oil companies in foreign areas and Alaska may have drained off funds that would normally have been available for exploration and development of continental, including continental shelf, gas resources. Failure of the Federal government to offer oil and gas leases in areas in the federal domain may have affected reserve additions. The "shortage" may be a result of a combination of some or all of these forces or of others not mentioned. Or the "shortage" may be contrived to force higher prices for natural gas. Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Sub-Committee on Antitrust and Monopoly, Honorable George P. Shultz on March 3, 1970, said:

> The [petroleum] industry is capable of behaving irrationally for short periods, and even of contriving an apparent disaster by ceasing exploration [and] dramatically revising its reserve additions downward . . . [Such industry action could] produce an appearance of crisis calling for immediate 'corrective' action, e.g., . . . higher prices. . . . The industry associations could help to produce such an impression . . . And we must not forget that the

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[14] A lag between exploratory efforts and production of at least several years rules out any relationship between the Commission's orders in this case and the "shortage" which is alleged to have developed on the heels of the Commission's orders.

> 'facts' for decision will be produced largely by these same firms and associations.
>
> The industry is not monopolistic enough to sustain a false reaction over an extended period; in the long run the normal commercial motives will reassert themselves and objective facts would win out. But we have no assured means of preventing overreaction or downright manipulation in the short run, nor is it clear how the administration would distinguish between a fake disaster and a real one.

Whatever the cause or causes of the "shortage" may be, it is a circumstance that is not relevant to review of the orders in this case. The court below noted (App. A, p. 52) that "circumstances" had developed subsequent to the close of the record and issuance of the Commission's decisions that "indicate a possibility, indeed perhaps a certainty, that the supply of gas is dangerously low." The "circumstances" included speeches made by members of the Commission (App. A, p. 53), clearly extra-record and non-evidentiary and an FPC Staff *Report on National Gas Supply and Demand*, (App. A, p. 54) issued six months after the Commission's order on rehearing. With respect to this latter document, which is also extra-record and non-evidentiary, the lower court stated (App. A, p. 58):

> . . . We do not know whether the information that has reached us is correct or not. Staff states that 'For purposes of this report we have accepted at face value all industry furnished data. Our conclusions must therefore be weighed against the assumed accuracy of our data base.' It also states that it is setting forth only one of several possible forecasts, albeit it is the one it thinks most probable.

The whole question of "shortage" was then placed in proper perspective by the court (App. A, p. 58):

> . . . our best course is to keep within the proper sphere of a reviewing court. The point is that the probability of shortage *based on new evidence* is not before us for review; all that is before us is the legal

adequacy, and not the wisdom, of the Commission's orders. (italics supplied)

The true nature and cause or causes of the "shortage" are not known and are yet to be established. The Commission has instituted a new proceeding at Docket No. AR69-1 to do just that and to determine whether rate revisions are in order. Docket No. AR69-1 is the place for the remedy *if* the "shortage" is price-related. *ICC v. Jersey City*, 322 U.S. 503, 515; *National Labor Relations Board v. Condenser Corp.*, 128 F.2d 67, 81 (CA 3).[15] The claim of a gas shortage is simply not relevant to the disposition of the Commission's rate orders.

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[15] ". . . If upon the coming down of the order litigants might demand rehearings as a matter of law because some new circumstance has arisen, some new trend has been observed, or some new fact discovered, there would be little hope that the administrative process could ever be consummated in an order that would not be subject to reopening . . ." (322 U.S. at 515). "The legal situation has to be viewed as of the time of the Board's Decision; otherwise, there is the danger, often spoken of, of making a merry-go-around of the Act." (128 F.2d at 81).

CONCLUSION

The petitions for writs of certiorari in Nos. 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, and 685 should be denied.

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